THE RECOVERY KERNEL

How to Navigate the Recovery Kernel

For People Recovering from Behavioral Addictions

Compulsive gambling (including sports betting, day trading, and crypto speculation), compulsive shopping and spending (including big-ticket purchases like cars, and credit-card debt), gaming, and the quieter dependencies on passive media, background audio, and music during exercise. A step-by-step route: what to read, in what order, and what to expect.

> **HARM REDUCTION RESOURCE — NOT MEDICAL ADVICE. There is no substance here, and the pull can still be as strong as any drug's.** If you have lost money you cannot afford to lose, are hiding it, or feel there is no way out, please do not carry it alone. **National Problem Gambling Helpline: 1-800-522-4700 (chat at ncpgambling.org/chat).** Crisis: call or text 988. SAMHSA: 1-800-662-4357.
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> **Act on access today, not when the urge is here.** The Kernel says the moment of the urge is the worst moment to decide: set the blocks (self-exclusion, removing saved cards and apps, handing someone else access to large sums) when you are calm.

1. Before you start

This is a route through the Recovery Kernel for people whose gambling, spending, gaming, or screen and audio habits have become compulsive, and for the people around them. The Kernel's thesis: the dopamine circuit does not care whether the input is fentanyl or a slot machine. The same machinery runs through unpredictable rewards ("variable ratio reinforcement," the most powerful learning schedule known), and the outcome is the same: lost time, strained relationships, financial damage, and needing more to feel less. It says the stigma is different (the gambler is told they lack discipline), but the mechanism and the recovery architecture are the same. The Compendium adds the frame that runs through the whole guide: "the pattern is the addiction, not the vehicle," so the hunger will move to a new host unless it is met directly. Six rules follow.

- **Block access first.** The Kernel says willpower alone is the weakest level of protection and that virtually everyone loses at it. The strongest protection makes the behavior impossible: self-excluded from casinos, cash only, no cards.
- **Name the hunger.** Every behavior is meeting a real need (excitement, escape, connection, identity, mood). If you remove the behavior without meeting the need, it finds a new vehicle.
- **Numbers are numbers, not verdicts.** For money, the Kernel's protocol treats a debt as a quantity owed and a credit score as a calculation, and says shame prevents the examination recovery requires.
- **There is no windfall.** The Kernel says the grand solution the mind craves (the big win, the deal) does not come. What comes is the payment made today.
- **Watch for the mask change.** Quitting one behavior often starts another, including drinking, gambling, shopping, gaming, and pornography. The Kernel gives a five-question test.

- **Do not wait for test results to start.** The genome refines the plan (Main Book, Quick-Start Step 3; Supp. Ch. 5, Step 1b), but access and money come first.

How chapters are cited. "Main Book" is the Recovery Kernel Main Book (Second Edition, Centurian). "Compendium" is the Complete Protocol Compendium. "Supp. Ch. N" is chapter N of the Supplemental Book. Section numbers (§) refer to sections inside those chapters. The Kernel's companion pieces for this topic: Supp. Ch. 38 (Stop the Bleed), Supp. Ch. 42 (Full Inventory), Supp. Ch. 44 (The Transplant), and Supp. Ch. 45 (The Chrysalis).

> **A note on sources and numbering.** Supplemental Chapter 40 ("No Substance Required") is the core chapter. It covers gambling, gaming, movies and TV, radio and background audio, and music dependency during exercise, and it names compulsive shopping only in passing (as a behavior that DRD2 A1 is over-represented in). It has no section on shopping, big-ticket purchases like cars, or credit cards. The Kernel does cover those elsewhere, so this guide brings them in from where they live: Compendium Protocol 02 (Behavioral Addictions), which has a full "Acquisition Hunger" section on shopping; Compendium Protocol 23 (Rebuilding the Ledger), which is the Kernel's credit-card and debt protocol; and the Financial Triage in Supp. Ch. 42 (Full Inventory). Those parts are labeled, and anything I apply beyond what those pages say (for example to expensive cars) is marked as added by this guide. Chapter 40 cites almost no protocols by number, so there is little numbering to correct.
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> In gambling and spending, the same pattern shows up as chasing losses or buying something bigger when the expected relief doesn’t arrive — the structural tools in this guide are built for exactly that moment.
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> Redosing is not the only version of this. Watching peers in a treatment setting negotiate a relapse, getting confident advice from someone untrained in your specific situation, or noticing a prescriber treat a prescribed substance more casually than an illicit one can all trigger the same pattern: a felt doubt read as “the plan must be wrong,” answered by abandoning it. See **The Commandeering Map**, a companion to this series, for the fuller pattern, including how it can differ by genetic profile and what helps when practice-based resistance alone is not enough.

2. The route at a glance

Steps 0 and 1 come first. Steps 2 to 4 can run at the same time. Steps 5 to 9 overlap and are the work of the first year. Step 10 is everything after. "P" means Compendium Protocol; "C" means Centurian Paper.

Step	When	What you do	Turn to
0	Day 0	Triage: money emergency, who to call, co-occurring substances, and the first blocks.	Supp. Ch. 40 §2.3; Ch. 42 §4.1 Compendium P02 (access hierarchy) Main Book, Quick-Start Step 1
1	Days 0–7	Name the pattern: the cycle, the five questions, and which form it takes.	Compendium P02 §2.1–2.2 Supp. Ch. 40 §1, Self-Assessment
2	Weeks 1–4	Read the Main Book in order.	Main Book: Who This Book Is For, Quick-Start, Part One (Ch. 1–5) Supp. Ch. 2, 3

Step	When	What you do	Turn to
3	Weeks 1–4	Order 30× whole-genome sequencing. DRD2, COMT, MTHFR.	Supp. Ch. 5 Step 1 Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2 Compendium P06
4	Weeks 2–6	Resolve your profile.	Supp. Ch. 5 Steps 2–3, 6 Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2
5	Weeks 0–2, then ongoing	Block access and build friction: self-exclusion, cards, apps, a trusted holder.	Compendium P02 (disruption point three) Compendium P23 §23.3 Supp. Ch. 40 §2.3, §7.1
6	Days 0–90	Stop the bleeding and do the ledger: triage, the complete accounting, credit-card and debt reconstruction.	Supp. Ch. 42 §4 Compendium P23 §23.1–23.6
7	Weeks 1–12, then ongoing	Urges: see the trigger, surf the wave, and the gambling distortions.	Compendium P02 (disruption points one and two) Supp. Ch. 40 §2.1, §2.3
8	Weeks 2–24	Meet the hunger directly: real stakes, real flow, silence, and the body.	Compendium P02 (disruption point four) Supp. Ch. 40 §2.2, §3, §4, §6, §7 Supp. Ch. 44, 45
9	Ongoing	Watch for the mask change. Quarterly check.	Compendium P02 §2.1 (the mask change) Supp. Ch. 40 Self-Assessment
10	Year 1 to 10	Identity and stewardship: the phase reframe and the transplant.	Supp. Ch. 38, 44, 42 Compendium C-28, P24, P25

3. The route, step by step

Step 0 — Triage (Day 0, before everything)

Three checks. Money: the Kernel's Financial Triage says to stop all automatic payments today (streaming, subscription boxes, memberships, anything not essential), so the bleeding stops before anything else, and to look at the full picture only after that. Support: call the helpline above if you are in a hole or hiding it. Other substances: if you also drink or use, or you have just quit something, the Compendium warns the hunger can move, so read Step 9 now. If you are also in a situation with legal risk (for example, money taken from someone to gamble), get legal advice, which the Kernel does not address.

> **Added by this guide (not in the Kernel).** Gambling and debt crises carry an elevated risk of suicidal thoughts. If you have thoughts of ending your life, call or text 988 right away, and tell someone. Shame is what keeps people silent, and the Kernel's point about shame applies fully here.

Turn to: Supp. Ch. 42 §4.1 (stop all automatic payments today), Supp. Ch. 40 §2.3 (the gambling recovery protocol). Compendium Protocol 02 (the access hierarchy). Main Book, Quick-Start Boot Sequence, Step 1. Compendium Protocol 01, Emergency Triage, for an acute crisis state.

Step 1 — Name the pattern (Days 0–7)

The Kernel's universal cycle has five parts: a trigger (an emotion, a body state, a place, a time), a craving (dopamine fires in anticipation: the wanting, not the having), the behavior (betting, buying, clicking, playing, watching), the reward (real but brief relief), and the depletion (dopamine drops below where you started, and the cycle returns). Its five-question test for whether a behavior has become the pattern: is it compulsive (hard to stop once begun), progressive (needing more for the same effect), causing consequences you continue despite, used to escape or regulate emotion, and generating shame or secrecy? Three or more "yes" means the cycle is running. Chapter 40 adds a short self-assessment: can you choose not to do this today with no more discomfort than skipping a neutral activity; does it feel like a choice or a pull; has the time you give it expanded; when you stop, do you feel better or feel the pull to start; and is there something you are avoiding that you can name?

Then identify which forms are yours. The Kernel names them: gambling (its Compendium entry includes sports betting, online poker, lottery and scratch tickets, fantasy sports with money, and day trading and cryptocurrency speculation, which it calls gambling "wearing a financial mask"); shopping (online shopping at 3 a.m., in-store sprees, collecting beyond use, deal-hunting, auction sites, and subscription boxes); gaming; passive media; background audio; and music during exercise.

Turn to: Compendium Protocol 02 §2.1 (the universal pattern; the mask change: the five-question test) and §2.2 (the forms the hunger takes). Supp. Ch. 40 §1 and the Behavioral Addiction Self-Assessment.

Step 2 — Read the Main Book (Weeks 1–4)

Read it in order once you are settled. If you are overwhelmed, the Quick-Start Boot Sequence is designed to be read on its own. Read "Who This Book Is — and Is Not — For" first: it names situations where the supplement protocols need medical modification, including active psychosis, pregnancy, and severe liver disease.

Read in this order: Who This Book Is For → Quick-Start Boot Sequence → Part One: Ch. 1 (Why Willpower Isn't Enough, which is this guide's core argument), Ch. 2 (MTHFR), Ch. 3 (COMT; the Warrior profile maps onto gambling), Ch. 4 (CYP450), Ch. 5 (When Systems Collide) → Part Two, the case files (Chapter 6). Ch. 8 (Oxytocin Protocol) is experimental and specialist-only. Ch. 9 (Epigenetic Playground) belongs to Steps 8 and 10. Appendix A and Appendix B are reference.

Then add: Supp. Ch. 2 (Clarity · Restoration · Manning). The Kernel has no behavioral-addiction case study. Supp. Ch. 38 (Stop the Bleed), Supp. Ch. 42 (Full Inventory), Supp. Ch. 44 (The Transplant), and Supp. Ch. 45 (The Chrysalis), which Chapter 40 ends by naming. Supp. Ch. 3 (The Addict Virgin Problem) recalibrates timelines. Supp. Ch. 1 (Why They Left You There) is optional reading for the shame.

Step 3 — Get your DNA (Weeks 1–4)

The Kernel's recommended route is 30× whole-genome sequencing, which returns a VCF file, a one-time asset you keep. A consumer SNP array is an acceptable start. Homocysteine, B12, and RBC folate are functional markers you can recheck quarterly.

Chapter 40 names three shared variants. **DRD2 A1** (Reward Deficiency Syndrome, with roughly 40 percent fewer D2 receptors by the Kernel's figure): ordinary pleasures register less, so a high-intensity input fills a real gap. The Kernel says it is over-represented in gambling, compulsive gaming, compulsive eating, and compulsive shopping. **COMT Val/Val** (Warrior): fast dopamine clearance, a sharp peak and a sharp drop that drives quick re-engagement, and a competitive, intensity-seeking nature that maps onto high-stakes gambling and competitive gaming. **MTHFR C677T homozygous**: reduced dopamine and serotonin synthesis, a low baseline that a casino visit or a gaming session can temporarily make feel normal. Until results arrive: does ordinary life feel flat compared to the activity; do you thrive on competition and stakes; do you feel much better during the behavior than in ordinary life without being able to say why?

> **Confirm what you are ordering.** Supp. Ch. 5 specifies 30× whole-genome sequencing with VCF output. "WGBS" more commonly names whole-genome bisulfite sequencing, a DNA-methylation assay that is not built to call variants such as MTHFR C677T. Ask the lab for a standard variant file (VCF).

Turn to: Supp. Ch. 5, Step 1. Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2 (the shared pharmacogenomics of behavioral addiction). Compendium Protocol 06, Phenotype Assessment. Main Book Ch. 2 and Ch. 3 self-assessments.

Step 4 — Resolve your profile (Weeks 2–6)

Write your profile down and carry key results on a card.

If your result is...	What changes	Source
DRD2 A1	A baseline reward deficit. Ordinary pleasures feel thin, so you need more input. Build several reward sources, not one, and consider D2 receptor support with your clinician.	Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2; Main Book Ch. 3
COMT Val/Val (Warrior)	Gambling and competitive gaming give sharp peaks that suit you. Recovery needs genuine, high-stakes, skill-based competition in a legitimate form, not simulation.	Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2, §2.3
MTHFR C677T homozygous	A low neurotransmitter baseline that the behavior compensates for. 5-MTHF (not synthetic folic acid) is often the first step, and it may explain why ordinary life feels flat.	Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2; Main Book Ch. 2

Turn to: Supp. Ch. 5, Steps 2, 3, and 6 (gene systems, combined profiles, profile template). Supp. Ch. 40 §1.2. Main Book Ch. 5 and Appendix A.

Step 5 — Block access and build friction (Weeks 0–2, then ongoing)

The Kernel's most direct rule: "access is everything," and its hierarchy of protection has four levels. Level one, impossible: self-excluded from casinos, no internet in the bedroom, cash only, no credit cards. Level two, very difficult: it takes real effort, such as a 30-minute drive or asking someone for a password, enough that the 15-to-30-minute craving window expires first. Level three, moderate friction: timers and basic blocks that you can disable in a determined moment. Level four, willpower alone: full access and only the resolution of the moment, the level at which the cycle defeats virtually everyone. Aim for levels one and two.

Gambling. Enroll in self-exclusion at every licensed casino, online platform, and betting site, before the next urge, since the friction is almost zero when calm and prohibitive during an urge. Hand financial control of large sums to a trusted person: not giving up oversight, giving up unilateral access, on the logic that you cannot lose $500 if you do not have $500 in reach. Use scheduled blocks (Cold Turkey, Freedom) for online platforms at your highest-risk hours (late evening, early morning), and remember the Kernel counts day trading and crypto speculation as gambling.

Shopping, big-ticket purchases, and credit cards. From Protocol 23 (Stopping the Outflow), three structural interventions. A **trusted holder** for the first 90 days: a sponsor, a stable relative, or a financial counselor who holds your cards, sees account activity, and approves larger purchases, with a cash allowance for daily needs. The Kernel frames it as a crutch for a broken leg, temporary, not humiliation. A **spending sandbox**: a prepaid card loaded weekly with a fixed discretionary amount, with no credit line or overdraft, as your only card for non-essential spending, so when it hits zero the category is closed. And **latency injection**: delete saved payment details from browsers, remove shopping apps, and impose a waiting period of at least 24 hours on any non-essential purchase, because impulses decay when time is inserted. The Compendium also lists the vehicles to block: saved cards, promotional emails, apps, auction sites, and subscription boxes.

> **Added by this guide (not in the Kernel): expensive cars and other very large purchases.** The Kernel's Financial Triage treats a car as transportation and an income tool, and says that if a car is expensive and not needed for income, it is the first thing to reassess. It does not discuss shopping for luxury cars specifically. Applying its framework: treat car listing apps, dealership emails, and price-alert notifications as the same kind of vehicle as any shopping app (remove or block them), give any big-ticket purchase a far longer wait than 24 hours, and have your trusted holder or counselor see it before you sign. The Kernel's point that "the hunt is the high" and the item loses its charge soon after you own it fits the pattern well. Check any financing offer with someone you trust before you accept it.

Gaming, streaming, and audio. Chapter 40 adds device-level tools, since intention-level fixes fail: Screen Time or Digital Wellbeing limits set on a calm Sunday and locked with a trusted person's password for the first 90 days; blocks; deleting apps so re-downloading is friction; and charging the phone, controller, and remote outside the bedroom, with an alarm clock so the phone is not needed at night.

Turn to: Compendium Protocol 02 (disruption point three: block the access; the hierarchy of protection). Compendium Protocol 23 §23.3 (stopping the outflow). Supp. Ch. 40 §2.3 (the gambling recovery protocol) and §7.1 (the digital wellness toolkit).

Step 6 — Stop the bleeding and rebuild the ledger (Days 0–90)

This is the Kernel's credit-card and debt protocol, and it starts with a reframe: a debt is a quantity owed, a credit score is a number calculated by an algorithm, and an unopened pile of mail is information not yet read. None of these says anything about your character. It names three ways compulsive behavior distorts the ledger: the **craving tax** (spending as chemical management, real money for a boost that lasts minutes to hours); the **avoidance spiral** (unopened bills growing into compound damage, because the imagined total is worse than the real one); and **accumulated debt** (credit-card balances carried from years of dopamine spending, plus the downstream effects on housing, transportation, and wages).

First, triage. Stop all automatic payments (Step 0). Then every dollar flows through the Financial Triage priority stack: shelter and essential utilities first; transportation (car payment and insurance, with the reassessment note above); food that is bought and cooked, not delivered; basic phone service only; income-generating tools only; life-sustaining medical; then minimum debt service, only what prevents catastrophic legal consequences; and everything else after 90 days of demonstrated stability. On credit cards specifically, it says minimum payments can be negotiated and most companies have hardship programs that reduce interest and minimums.

Then the complete accounting (the Amnesty Audit). Gather all the mail in one place without opening it; open and sort it; log every account (creditor, balance, interest rate, minimum, and status: current, past due, in collections, or charged off), including online accounts and a free credit report; calculate monthly income minus essential fixed expenses to find what is available; and add the balances into one number you write down and look at. The Kernel says it is finite and specific.

Then automate. Automate all minimum payments to arrive two to three days after payday; automate one extra payment to a single priority debt (spreading it thins every timeline); and automate a small weekly savings transfer, so one unexpected expense does not become a new card balance. Choose a method: avalanche (highest interest first; least interest paid), snowball (smallest balance first; faster wins), hybrid (the smallest one or two first, then the highest interest, the Kernel's recommended default for people in recovery), or emergency first (whatever threatens housing, transportation, or wages right now). Negotiation: the Kernel says asking directly for a lower rate succeeds roughly half the time, that a hardship program is the next step, that collection debts can often be settled for well under face value with any agreement in writing before payment and a request for deletion from the credit report, and that medical bills are among the most negotiable. There is no windfall coming: "the number will reach zero" through consistent small payments.

Retrain the reward. Because paying down debt registers first as loss, the Kernel builds reward into it: a visible progress tracker, small pre-planned non-spending pleasures at each milestone, a countdown to the debt-free date recalculated after each payment, and a payment ritual (look at the balance, pay, watch it drop, name the difference).

> **Added by this guide (not in the Kernel).** Settling or negotiating with creditors and collectors can have credit-report and tax consequences that vary by place, and large or complex debt, especially if it involves gambling debts, borrowed money, or anything legal, is worth a free or low-cost session with a nonprofit credit counselor or a lawyer before you sign anything. Do not take on new debt to pay old debt.

Turn to: Supp. Ch. 42 §4 (the financial triage protocol: §4.1 stop automatic payments; §4.2 the priority stack; §4.3 the financial damage inventory). Compendium Protocol 23 (Rebuilding the Ledger), §23.1 (how the damage accumulated), §23.2 (the complete accounting), §23.3 (stopping the outflow), §23.4 (the small payment principle), §23.5 (rewiring the reward), §23.6 (prioritization and negotiation). Local resources the Kernel names: 211.org.

Step 7 — Urges: see the trigger, surf the wave (Weeks 1–12, then ongoing)

The Kernel's first two disruption points. See the trigger: for one week, every time you do the behavior or feel the urge, record the time, place, who you were with, what happened in the prior hour, your body state (hungry, angry, lonely, tired, in pain), and the thought that came first. Patterns appear, and changing the environment before the cycle starts is far easier than interrupting it once running. Surf the wave: an urge lasts about 15 to 30 minutes and dies if not fed. Notice it without fighting or engaging; locate it in your body; breathe into the sensation; watch it rise, peak, and fall; and set a 30-minute timer and do something else. Check whether it has passed.

For gambling specifically, the Kernel names four cognitive distortions and says CBT aimed at them is the primary treatment: the near-miss effect (two of three symbols registers as almost winning, more motivating than a plain loss); the gambler's fallacy (a streak makes the next result more or less likely); the illusion of control (skill in sports betting or poker leaks into the random part); and chasing (bigger bets to recover a loss, which raises the risk). It also cites naltrexone, the opioid-receptor blocker that reduces gambling urges in clinical trials, as one of the few medications with specific evidence for a behavioral addiction, as a prescriber's decision.

Turn to: Compendium Protocol 02 (disruption points one and two: see the trigger; surf the wave). Supp. Ch. 40 §2.1 (the specific mechanisms) and §2.3 (the gambling recovery protocol). Compendium Protocol 01 (the HALT scan).

Step 8 — Meet the hunger directly (Weeks 2–24)

The Kernel's deepest disruption: identify what the behavior actually provides, because the hunger will find a new vehicle if it is not met. For excitement and stimulation: physical challenge, adventure, and competition with real stakes. For escape and numbing: address the pain source, build real coping, and allow rest. For connection and belonging: real relationships and real community. For achievement and status: real mastery. Matched to the forms:

- **Gambling.** It provides excitement and the promise of transformation, escape (casinos are built to remove clocks and ordinary time), and social belonging. The natural equivalents: genuine competitive risk with real stakes and skill (entrepreneurship, athletic competition), the absorbing flow of real challenge, and the same community in competitive settings without money (the chess club, a competitive circuit).
- **Shopping and big-ticket buying.** The Kernel says the hunt is the high, the item loses its charge quickly, and the emotional function is mood regulation ("retail therapy"), identity ("I am what I own"), and filling an emptiness with no name. So the work is identity and emptiness, not the purchase: real stakes and mastery for identity, real connection for emptiness, and treating mood directly. Protocol 02 calls this the "identity purchase."
- **Gaming.** Games are designed by behavioral psychologists to maximize session length, with loot boxes, social obligations, progress systems, and night-time raids that damage sleep. The Kernel says flow itself is healthy, and the problem is when the game supplies it more reliably than life does. The answer is to make ordinary life compete: real-world skill and challenge, not removing games. Use scheduled gaming, digital friction, a firm sleep line, and the conversation with your group ("I play Tuesday and Saturday, 7 to 10"), and transplant the skill (strategy into business or chess, reflex into sport, world-building into writing).
- **Movies and TV.** The Kernel calls it the addiction with no name because it is normal. Its tools: pay per episode for anything new, a 20-minute break after every episode, books as the active equivalent, a content-to-production ratio (for each hour consumed, work toward an hour of something made), and watching actively with a question in mind. It also names the "comfort show" as a simulation of company that lets real company atrophy.
- **Radio and background audio.** The addiction is to the absence of silence. Progressive silence exposure (begin with five minutes in a daily activity that usually has audio), then 15 minutes of sitting without audio, which it says surfaces the thoughts that have been waiting.
- **Music during exercise.** The Kernel is not against music. It says the dependency version masks the body's feedback, effort calibration, and the meditative quality of rhythmic exercise. The test: can you finish a whole workout without it? The protocol: one music-free session a week (short, 15 to 20 minutes at first; the discomfort passes within two or three sessions), naming body sensations aloud, alternating over 8 to 12 weeks, and aiming for about half your sessions music-free so that music is a choice. This is the Kernel's own framing and the strongest claim in the chapter; see the evidence note.

> **A tension inside the Kernel to know about.** Chapter 40 suggests redirecting a gambling drive into "legitimate investment (not speculative)" or "investing with a defined small amount specifically designated as risk capital." Its own Protocol 02 classifies day trading and crypto speculation as gambling. For someone with active gambling disorder, this guide advises not using the "risk capital" idea unless a clinician who knows your history agrees. The safer redirections are the non-financial ones above.

Turn to: Compendium Protocol 02 (disruption point four: meet the hunger directly). Supp. Ch. 40 §2.2 (what gambling is providing), §3.2–3.3 (gaming), §4.3 (TV and movies), the radio section, §6.3 (the music-free exercise protocol), and §7 (the common architecture). Supp. Ch. 44 (The Transplant) and Supp. Ch. 45 (The Chrysalis).

Step 9 — Watch for the mask change (Ongoing)

The Compendium's warning: someone quits drinking, is proud at ninety days, and is now gambling daily, shopping compulsively, gaming for ten hours, or eating past pain, saying "at least I am not drinking." The neuroscience calls it cross-sensitization (reward pathways primed by one source respond more readily to any other). Recovery is not switching vehicles. Use the five-question test again for any new behavior, and note that the pull toward a new mask is usually the same unmet need. Chapter 40 adds a common architecture across all five behaviors: variable-ratio rewards, an escape function, a way of structuring time, an identity component (gamer, gambler, film buff, music lover), and a natural equivalent for each. Its device-level and friction tools apply to whatever the next behavior turns out to be.

Turn to: Compendium Protocol 02 §2.1 (the mask change) and the Key Takeaways. Supp. Ch. 40 §7 (the common architecture) and the Behavioral Addiction Self-Assessment. Supp. Ch. 32 §3 and the caffeine guide in this series for one example of a substitute that is not neutral.

Step 10 — Identity and the long game (Year 1 to Year 10)

The identity component is real: "gambler," "gamer," "shopper," "film buff" become part of the self. The Kernel's reframe, from Stop the Bleed, is that the activity was a phase of the identity, not a permanent feature: the gamer can become a game designer, the film buff a filmmaker, the gambling identity a competitive entrepreneur. The drive is not the problem, the vehicle is. Full Inventory is a structured 180-day plan, and Amends to Self puts the person who lived through it first. Navigation after the first year shifts from repair to stewardship. Section 4 shows how. Standing tools: Supp. Ch. 44 (The Transplant: redirect the devotion and daily structure the pattern required into a practice that grows). Supp. Ch. 6 (Stay Non-Addicted). Compendium Protocol 13 (The Pharma Trap). Supp. Ch. 38. Supp. Ch. 5, Step 6 (a weekly AI check-in profile, a reasoning tool and never a provider).

Turn to: Supp. Ch. 38 (Stop the Bleed: the phase reframe). Supp. Ch. 44 (The Transplant). Supp. Ch. 42 (Full Inventory). Supp. Ch. 43 (Amends to Self). Centurian Paper C-28 (The Recast). Compendium Protocol 24 (Returning to Work), Protocol 25 (The Open Door). Supp. Ch. 51 (Family & Support Network Guide): give it to the people who love you.

4. How navigation changes at Years 3, 5, and 10

Shading shows how much attention each track needs. Darkest is primary focus, then active, then maintenance. White cells with gray text are standing safeguards: low effort, never dropped. Numbers in brackets refer to the shifts listed below the table. The Kernel gives almost no timeline for behavioral addictions beyond the first 90 days, so this whole table is projection.

Track	Months 0–24 (foundation)	Year 3 (consolidate)	Year 5 (build out)	Year 10 (steward)
Safety and money triage	Outflow stopped; help line ready	Buffer built; no new debt [1]	Quarterly money check	Big buys wait; delay rule kept [7]
Biology and genome	DRD2, COMT; MTHFR, 5-MTHF	Retest labs; step stack to upkeep [2]	Prescriber card: DRD2, COMT	Re-check with new meds and age
Access and friction	Access blocked; self-exclude, cards	Friction kept; holder eased [3]	Blocks reviewed yearly	Friction stays by design
Urges and transfer watch	Log triggers; surf the wave	Urges rarer; named quickly	Triggers shift: stress, boredom [4]	Same plan, rehearsed
Debt and ledger	Accounting done; autopay set	Balances falling; date on the wall	Debt nearly clear; buffer growing [5]	Buffer kept; no new debt
Meeting the hunger	Find the hunger; real-stakes plan	Real flow built; skills growing	Competition, craft, silence practiced	Chosen, not compelled
Identity and Manning	Phase reframe: not permanent	Transplant; new identity	Manning: peer and guide [6]	Mentor or run a group

The seven shifts

1. **Year 3, a buffer is built and there is no new debt.** The Kernel's automated savings transfer exists so one unexpected expense does not become a new card balance (Protocol 23 §23.4). By year 3 that buffer should be doing its job, and the priority stack should be fully covered without borrowing.
2. **Year 3, the stack moves from building to upkeep.** Retest labs (Supp. Ch. 5 Step 1a) and step down toward maintenance. The Trinity chapter says supplements are taken until stable, then tapered and resumed if the system destabilizes; Main Book Ch. 2 treats MTHFR support as maintenance, not cure. Step down to maintenance, not to zero.
3. **Year 3, the trusted holder is eased, and friction stays.** The Kernel frames the trusted holder as a crutch for the first ninety days, after which access returns (Protocol 23 §23.3). By year 3, the holder can step back, but the structural friction (the sandbox card, the waiting period, the blocks, self-exclusion) stays. This shift applies a Kernel rule at a timing chosen for this guide.
4. **Year 5, triggers shift to stress and boredom.** The Kernel names boredom, stress, and flat ordinary life as recurring drivers (Supp. Ch. 40 §2.2, §7). As

original cues fade, what remains is the hunger itself. Keep the urge-surfing practice and the quarterly check. This shift is extrapolation.

5. **Year 5, the debt is nearly clear.** The Kernel says the number is finite and reduces with consistent payment, but gives no timeline (Protocol 23). The hybrid method and the countdown give you a date. Keep the payment ritual going after the last account closes, since the reward retraining is what protects against the return of the craving tax. This shift is extrapolation.
6. **Year 5, Manning.** This is the Trinity's third stage (Supp. Ch. 2). This is extrapolation: peer support and practical guidance for others with gambling and spending problems, including the money side, which many people are ashamed to say aloud.
7. **Year 10, big purchases wait, and access rules stay.** Latency injection is designed to be permanent (Protocol 23 §23.3), and the Kernel says willpower alone is the level at which the cycle defeats almost everyone (Protocol 02). Keep a delay on large purchases, with a second person for the biggest, and keep self-exclusion in place. This shift is partly extrapolation.

What is sourced and what is extrapolated. *Shifts 1 and 3 rest on Kernel text (Protocol 23), with the timing of shift 3 chosen for this guide. Shift 2 applies Kernel rules at a timing chosen for this guide. Shifts 4, 5, 6, and 7 are extrapolations. The Kernel gives no timeline for behavioral addiction beyond the first 90 days.*

5. What outcome to expect

The short version

The Kernel has no behavioral-addiction case study, timeline, or percentages, so this section is qualitative and does not make up numbers. If you do the route above, with access blocked, the bleeding stopped and the ledger rebuilt, the urges met and surfed, the hunger met directly, and the mask change watched, this is what the Kernel supports:

- **The first weeks:** the outflow stops, the structure holds when willpower does not, and urges pass in 15 to 30 minutes when not fed.
- **The first 90 days:** the trusted holder and the sandbox card carry the highest-impulsivity period, the full accounting is done, and payments are automated.
- **Months 3 to 12:** balances fall on a visible schedule, the natural architecture (real stakes, flow, silence, the body) starts to carry the load, and the behavior becomes a choice you can decline.
- **By years 3 to 5 the work is maintenance and building. By year 10 you are a steward,** carrying a small set of standing safeguards.

The Kernel does not promise the pull vanishes. It says structure and meeting the hunger are what hold, and that the number in the ledger, however heavy, is finite and reduces with consistent small payments.

Milestones, in order

Milestone	When	Expected outcome	Source	Basis
Access blocked	Days 0–14	Self-exclusion done. Saved cards and apps removed. Trusted holder in place. Automatic payments stopped. Helpline number saved.	Compendium P02; Supp. Ch. 42 §4.1	Kernel projection
Urge window	Ongoing	An urge lasts about 15–30 minutes and dies if not fed. Log triggers for a week.	Compendium P02	Kernel projection
Complete accounting	Days 7–30	All mail gathered and sorted, every account logged, one number written down. Minimums automated.	Compendium P23 §23.2, §23.4	Kernel projection
Highest-impulsivity period	First 90 days	Trusted holder and sandbox card carry the load. Priority stack fully covered without borrowing before "everything else" resumes.	Compendium P23 §23.3; Supp. Ch. 42 §4.2	Kernel projection
Music-free adjustment	Sessions 1–3; weeks 8–12	The discomfort of music-free exercise passes within 2–3 sessions. Alternating over 8–12 weeks toward half music-free.	Supp. Ch. 40 §6.3	Kernel projection
Balances falling	Months 3–12+	A visible debt tracker and a countdown to the debt-free date. Milestones acknowledged with planned non-spending pleasures.	Compendium P23 §23.5	Kernel projection
Natural architecture	Months 2–12	Real-stakes competition, real flow, silence, and embodied practice begin to carry what the behavior did.	Supp. Ch. 40 §7; Ch. 44, 45	Kernel projection
Steward phase	Years 3–10	Structure kept. Ledger clear. Quarterly check. Standing safeguards.	Section 4 of this guide	Extrapolated

The Kernel's 12-month numbers: none for behavioral addictions

The Kernel has no behavioral-addiction case study and gives no projection, so there is no 12-month table here, and this guide will not make one up. What it offers is the structure above and the point that the same DRD2 A1, COMT, and MTHFR variants that drive substance addiction underlie these behaviors, so the substance guides in this series (especially cocaine, methamphetamine, and alcohol) are the nearest relatives.

What changes the outcome

- **Relying on willpower** with full access left in place. The Kernel calls this the level at which the cycle defeats virtually everyone.
- **Leaving the money unexamined.** The avoidance spiral, an unopened pile, or a total you have never written down.
- **Waiting for a windfall,** or chasing losses with bigger bets. The Kernel says no large event comes.
- **Keeping saved cards, apps, and one-click buying.** These make the gap between impulse and purchase seconds.

- **Treating day trading, crypto, or fantasy sports as "not gambling."** The Kernel counts them.
- **Removing the behavior without meeting the need.** The hunger finds a new vehicle.
- **Substituting** one behavior or substance for another and calling it recovery.
- **Shame and secrecy,** which keep the numbers unseen and the help uncalled.
- **A lapse.** The Kernel treats it as information, not judgment (Protocol 21). Tell your trusted person the same day, reset the blocks, and look at what trigger and need were underneath it.

How to read the evidence behind the outcomes

The Main Book marks claims with an Evidence Tier: Established, Probable, Emerging, Author/System Experience, and Controversial or Mixed. This guide's reading: variable-ratio reinforcement, the near-miss effect, the distortions in gambling, and CBT as a leading treatment are well supported, and gambling disorder is a recognized addictive disorder in the DSM-5 (the Kernel notes that internet gaming disorder is listed only for further study). Compulsive buying is not a formal DSM diagnosis, and the evidence for it is thinner than for gambling, though the same structural tools (friction, automation, counseling) are sensible. The Kernel's "40 percent fewer D2 receptors" figure, its claim that DRD2 A1 is over-represented in compulsive shopping, its statement that naltrexone works for gambling urges (trial evidence exists, but mixed), its claim that Netflix documented that removing autoplay reduces viewing, and its settlement figures (a rate cut "roughly half the time," settlements "as low as 25 to 40 percent") are the Kernel's own and unsourced, so treat them as guides, not guarantees. Its claims about music dependency during exercise, and that a person who cannot work out without music "has never actually worked out," are its most rhetorical, and I would treat them as a useful self-check and not a clinical condition. The supplement and gene sections, the natural-architecture comparisons, and the years 3 to 10 trajectory sit lower on that scale, so bring them to your clinician as questions, not as facts.

Take these to your clinician or counselor

- An honest description of the behavior: what, how often, how much time and money, how it started, and what you were feeling or avoiding, including any hiding, lying, or borrowing.
- Any other substance or behavior that increased when this one decreased, and any mood, anxiety, ADHD, or trauma history, since the Kernel treats those as drivers.
- A request for CBT aimed at gambling distortions if gambling is involved, and a question about naltrexone as an option for urges.
- Your DRD2, COMT, and MTHFR results if you have them, and every medication and supplement you take.
- For money: a request for a nonprofit credit counselor, a plan for the debt (using the accounting in Step 6), and, if legal issues are involved, a lawyer. Also ask about a trusted holder arrangement and how to set it up.